The Celeste Fairy

celeste. Celeste.
It is a word unfamiliar to likely half… no, seventy percent, or perhaps even over ninety percent of all Japanese.

Its meanings include «celestial» or «blue skies». And derived from those would be «a blue in the color of the skies». The image of *sky blue* would usually be invoked when asked to describe this color of the skies, but people of a certain hobby would immediately picture a pale turquoise blue at the word, celeste. Various shades of turquoise do exist, but the mint portion of choco-mint ice cream is somewhat close.
That said, that «certain hobby» naturally did not refer to wandering about to sample ice cream. The oldest bicycle-making company in the world, Bianchi, from Italy, associates itself with the color celeste. Asuna commented “Ooh, so it’s like *tiffany blue*, isn’t it?” after I told her about it, but well, is it… really like that? At any rate, I believe with near certainty that anyone in Japan, who is reminded of the color of mint ice cream when they hear “celeste”, has an interest in bicycles.

It was mainly due to the abovementioned reason that I could shout out “Woah, it’s a Bianchi!” immediately upon laying my eyes on the bicycle that appeared in the evening of that Friday, 10th April 2025*, without even confirming its manufacturer’s logo.

The moment I hung the blazer-type uniform I couldn’t get used to wearing onto the wall in my room and opened the southern window, a yell at maximum volume flew at me.
“Oni—cha—n!!”

After getting startled back with a “woah”, I looked down at the garden from the window. When I did so, Suguha in a jersey, who apparently got back home before me, was there waving her two hands to and fro.

“Come out here for a moment, c’mon, hurry up!!”

“H… hey, everyone in the neighborhood can hear that voice of yours, even if they have a girl around your age…”

Although I did try warning her in my position as her brother, I was suppressed with a single “Who cares about that!” line from her. Reluctantly raising my right hand to signal my acknowledgement, I went down the stairs with a still half-untied necktie dangling off me.

I got down to the garden through the living room and there, I finally noticed a large object beside Suguha. As a white cloth covered it from the top, nothing could be seen but an angular silhouette, long and narrow.

“What is it… what’s that?”

After cheerfully smiling away while looking upon my face, as I inclined my head, for nearly whole five seconds, Suguha gripped onto the white cloth with both hands. Must have been tough finding a cloth that

big; wait, that's a bed sheet, isn't it; mother's going to get mad at you later on… such thoughts came to me as I-

"Ta-da!"

Producing a sound effect like that with her mouth, Suguha tore off the sheets that immediately made them blow away. What appeared from beneath the cloth was a high-quality sports bicycle, shining a vivid celeste blue even under the sunset… commonly known as a *road bicycle*.
Woah, it's a Bianchi; what are you planning to do with this; don't tell me you bought it; it must have been ridiculously expensive… after suppressing my onslaught of questions once again, with her right palm, Suguha replied with a broad grin.

"Of course I bought it, but it wasn't that expensive. It's secondhand and there was some kind of reason behind it, so the mister at Rinrindou* gave me a huge discount on it."
Rinrindou referred to a nearby bicycle shop that Suguha and I frequented since kindergarten. The MTB I ride nowadays was bought from there as well, so there was no way that uncle in particular would try and force the sale of those bicycles with truly suspicious origins, like those involved in accidents or thief, but still—

"Even with a discount… this has a carbon frame and the parts are good too, so I'm sure it would normally fetch two hundred thousand* even when secondhand, though…"
"Eeh, really? Wow, I got it at an amazing bargain price…"

Just how far did you beat the price down; I scanned over the bicycle another time with that thought in my mind and finally noticed something.

"No, wait a moment, doesn't the size not suit you, Sugu? Try getting on, it's probably too big."

Suguha opened her eyes wide this time round after I said so, then slapped my left arm without warning.

"What are you saying! There's no way I would ride something like this. It's yours, oniichan, yours, to celebrate your enrollment!"

"Heh? Mine?"

After replying with a "goes without sayin', you idiot" in a tone similar to Klein's, Suguha finally gave an explanation from the start.

Apparently, Suguha and my parents had been discussing on a gift to celebrate my one-year-late enrollment into high school—or to be specific, a vocational school targeted at SAO survivors. As a result of their numerous discussions, they took reference from a serious road bicycle I once took an interest in and seemed to have given nothing but their budget to the Rinrindou uncle, entrusting him with the make and size.

“…So that’s the reason behind him telling me my MTB riding position was off and measuring my height and leg length when I dropped in the other day…”

“Ahaha, looks like the cat didn’t get out of the bag though the mister said ‘he might have noticed when I did the sizing’.”

“It didn’t occur to me at all…”

After shaking my head, I gently tried rubbing the bicycle’s frame, painted both celeste and black, while it maintained its position using a simple stand. Suguha said it was secondhand, but it seemed the previous owner took great care riding it as there were no obvious signs of damage, the metallic parts were polished carefully, and the bar tape and tires were swapped with new ones. After staring at the machine, that was so beautiful it nearly made me gasp, for a whole ten seconds, I turned and spoke to Suguha.

“Thanks a lot, Sugu. I’ll take good care of it… it feels like a waste to actually ride it…”

With that, my little sister replied with a somewhat embarrassed smile.

“Ehehe… but it’ll be sad for the bicycle if you don’t ride it. Keep yourself safe and ride it a lot!”

And, through that course of events—
Ten in the morning on a Sunday, two days later on the 12th of April, I was on the footpath in front of my home in the process of preparing for the assault, equipped with a helmet, sunglasses, gloves, and shoes for biking.

The Bianchi stood against the adjacent gatepost, gleaming as it bathed in the spring sunlight. Yesterday, I thought to ask for the details on the «particular reason» while receiving fine tuning at Rinrindou, but it allegedly wasn’t due to some severe problem like cracks on the frame, just that a part called the bottom bracket was stuck and couldn’t be removed.

‘Iron would have been fine, but it’s carbon, you see; it’s pretty darn scary trying to force it out… well, not like it’ll give you any trouble riding it, Kazu.’

And that was how he spoke. The BB was the spindle for the crank (the rod stuck to the pedal), so it does wear out the bearing inside, but my mileage of ten or twenty thousand kilometers of relaxed cycling with my lack of leg strength wouldn’t have any substantial effect on it.

After adding on other necessities such as a drink bottle, a saddlebag, and LED lights, I mounted my oft-used portable terminal onto the handlebars. Of course, data loggers specialized for bicycles exist as well, but there was a reason why I didn’t use one.

Finished with some simple warm-up exercises, I straddled the saddle that was quite a bit higher than my MTB’s and began cycling with caution even while nervous over my overtly forward-bent posture, feeling

absolutely no resistance as the slender high pressure tires rolled over the road and the speed accelerating after putting just a little strength into my feet on the pedals.

Just as I was about to exit the local road into the wide main road, I whispered into the small microphone attached to my sportswear's collar.

"Yui, you can come out now."

With that, the screen of the portable terminal mounted on the handlebars faintly glowed and a small girl jumped out. Her height was slightly less than ten centimeters, her limbs thinner than the shift cables right beside her. Of course, she didn't exist in reality. I could look at her as though she was real thanks to the see-through display built into my sunglasses, she was a so-called 'AR image'.

Having landed onto the portable terminal display that went black once again, the girl's long, black hair and white one piece fluttered in the travelling breeze as she grinned.

'Good morning, Papa!'

The girl's name is Yui. I, Kirito / Kirigaya Kazuto, met her, an AI, at the Floating Castle Aincrad that no longer exists.

Yui's main program now resides on the desktop PC in my room, after getting released from SAO. We mainly meet in the virtual world, but it's still possible to have a conversation through a portable terminal, or to look at her by using sunglasses with built-in see-through displays like this in the real world. The sunglasses are still rather crude, so it's tough wearing them the whole time, but it doesn't feel strange doing so when riding a road bicycle.

'Wah, the cherry blossoms are pretty, aren't they?'

Looking up at the fully bloomed cherry blossoms stretching a branch out from the sidewalk, Yui spoke in a happy voice. However, her field of vision was restricted to the internal camera in the portable terminal fixed onto the handlebars, so the resolution was poor and the angle couldn't be adjusted either. Something like a small dome camera that Yui could rotate at will would be ideal, but as expected, such a handy item couldn't be found both on the internet and at Akihabara.

I felt like appreciating the cherry blossoms overhead as well, but this road bicycle I was riding for the first time had a quicker than expected response rate, hardly giving me the chance to look away while riding. Focused on the front, I gave a command to Yui.

"Well then, start the system check, please."

'Yes, Papa!'

Yui sprightly replied and her expression vanished with her long eyebrows slightly raised. A voice that sounded more mechanical flowed out from the bone conduction speakers built into the sunglasses' arms.

‘Speed sensor connection… *OK*. Cadence censor connection… *OK*. Heart rate sensor connection… *OK*. Atmospheric temperature, body temperature, altitude sensors… *OK*. GPS connection… *OK*. Back eye camera connection… *OK*. *System, all green. Navigation and data logging, standby.*‘
“Ooh, that’s amazing, Yui. You’re like the real thing.”

A puzzled expression appeared on the petite fairy who raised her face at my opinion.

‘Real thing… in comparison to what, exactly?’

“Ah, nah, that’d be…”

Answering honestly with a “giant humanoid robot” here would likely cause problems in my beloved daughter’s education, so-

“You see, it seems there have been AIs loaded onto car navigation systems recently. That said, of course, you have way more functions than them, Yui!”

And I dodged the problem. My mouth loosened at Yui, slapping her two hands onto her waist and sticking her chest out with a “That goes without saying!”, before I gave another command.

“Well then, start the data logging, please. Also, display the route until Destination A.”

‘Understood!’

The instant Yui replied, the travelling speed, direction and speed of the wind, heart rate, temperature, and such data, along with an image of the rear from the back eye camera and even an arrow pointing out the route to take were displayed. I got scared at how it might become difficult to cycle with my vision in a jumble, but I felt a VRMMO’s user interface would contain more information through my senses.

“Dim the data display, please. Also, move the back monitor just a little down and to the right… *OK*. Well then, let’s get going!”
‘Let’s go!’

Yui sat back down facing the front and I stepped down on the pedals as hard as I could, taking her tiny right hand thrusting forward as my cue. The spring breeze that outstripped my bicycle scattered a few cherry blossom petals into my path.

Cycling 5 kilometers east through prefectural route 51 from Kawagoe, Saitama, where my home is, I entered the Arakawa Cycling Road. The destination I set beforehand was the park 13 kilometers to the south, so a round trip from home would make it a 36 kilometer course. That was a distance that someone cycling seriously could do while humming away, but it was a ride far too long for me, having returned to the real world for merely half a year.

Being a Sunday, the course seemed congested, but the falling sunlight felt pleasant and the thought, “The real world’s pretty nice too”, came into my mind unconsciously at the vivid blue skies and green earth. The slight headwind was a minus, but I insisted to myself that it would make trip back all the more relaxing as I turned the cranks.

It happened after I nonchalantly cycled for around twenty minutes with the able-bodied flying past my right. Yui, sitting on the handlebars with her body swaying, went ‘Huh?’ in a small voice.

“Something happened?”

When I whispered at a volume inaudible to the passing cyclists, Yui looked up at me and said something outside of my expectations.

‘I have been receiving electromagnetic waves of the ANT+ protocol since five seconds ago. The transmission source is… Papa’s bicycle, I believe.’

“Whut? From this bicycle…?”

I looked down at the frame in between my legs in a fluster, but I didn’t recall loading on any wireless devices aside from the sensors already connected to the portable terminal. It might have been the Bianchi’s previous owner in that case, but the Rinrindou uncle should have noticed if there was something there.

I instructed Yui after around five seconds of hesitation.

“Try pairing up with it, please.”

‘Understood.’

Yui closed her eyes and her lovely eyebrows drew together slightly—and her eyes flicked open.

“Wh-What is it? Did you find out what kind of device it is?”

‘Yes. I will visualize it now.’

…Visualization? Of what?

And with a blink of a eyes.

Pale blue beads of light formed atop the extinguished portable terminal screen on Yui’s immediate left, coalesced, and brought forth the form of a small object… no, a girl.

“Wah!”

I ended up jerking the handlebars from overwhelming surprise and after stabilizing the reeling bicycle frame in a panic, I fixed my eyes upon the girl standing atop the terminal (though she was actually on the sunglasses’ see-through display) once again.

She was the exact same size as Yui. She had short hair and was clothed in a fitting futuristic leotard, both colored light turquoise—the same celeste blue as the bicycle.

The mysterious girl slowly lifted her face, modeled slightly more matured than Yui's, with her eyelids raising at the same time. Her eyes that seemed to shine aquamarine stared at me and her lips moved.

'Good morning, *Master*. It has been nine hundred and seven days since the last ride.'
She was likely a personified interface that was at the level of those commercially sold, not to mention several years old, with her intonation clumsy and her expression practically static. Before my eyes, looking down at her in a daze, the girl continued her bland speech.

'Connection could not be established with the GPS and all other sensors. Remaining battery is below ten percent. Currently being charged from the internal dynamo.'

"I-Internal dynamo, she says?"

I gazed at the frame again. Dynamo referred to a power generator and one for headlights was often embedded in the front wheel axle for casual bicycles, like the one Suguha rides, or mamachari, but one couldn't possibly be placed in the lightweight wheels used for road bicycles. Listing down the other places that spin, there would be the rear wheel hub and… also, the bottom bracket.

"Ah… don't tell me there's a dynamo built into the bottom bracket shell… and that the BB got stuck due to forcing that modification…"

The frame beside the BB probably stored the device containing the celeste-colored girl as well. The empty battery got charged to the minimum level of electrical energy thanks to me turning the cranks all the way here from home and thus, the device started up.

The modification of inserting a dynamo into the BB that would increase its resistance, even if only slightly, must be an act of utmost heresy to the orthodox faction of cyclists, but it wasn't unimaginable for the brave being who embedded such a personified interface and even made it call him or her «Master». And it definitely wasn't a topic I, «Papa», could say anything about.

Having stopped my bicycle in the parking lot at the Cycling Road's side to gather my thoughts together for the moment, I gulped down water from the bottle and firmly stretched out. Although my back and waist had already started complaining due to the aimlessly hard saddle and the forward-bent posture unfamiliar to me, it definitely wasn't an unpleasant pain.

'Good job, Papa. The distance traveled so far is 12.7 kilometers and the estimated time of arrival at the destination is around 11:20.'

Beside Yui who fluently delivered the report while sitting on the handlebars, the light blue-clothed girl was standing still without speaking a word. Yui went to the effort of making her, an avatar meant to be

displayed on a data logger's small monitor originally, into a three-dimensional object to show me, so it was only natural for her to not move much, but I couldn't help but to feel a tinge of forlornness from the figure of the girl awaiting a command.

I did discover the reason behind the fixed BB, but that simply raised fresh doubts. Why did the previous Bianchi owner not extract the embedded device? Even if it couldn't be removed due to it being fixed there, why wasn't the memory deleted? The more I thought about it, the more confident I grew of one particular answer. That is, this Bianchi (and the celeste blue girl) left the previous owner's possession without deliberate intent—

There was no way the Rinrindou uncle would let a stolen bicycle be traded in. But road bicycles are seldom registered for security and he could have not known its origin after it got passed around multiple owners and shops, citing the defective BB as the reason. If this Bianchi was a stolen bicycle, the original owner must be still earnest searching, even now, after performing this much customization on it.

The current owner, me, is a so-called, «bona fide purchaser», and the celeste girl said 'It has been nine hundred and seven days since the last ride' earlier—that meant it had been over two years had passed since the theft and I had no obligation to return it for legal reasons. In addition, this was a congratulatory gift for my enrollment from Suguha and my parents, so I have no idea how much of a shock Suguha would receive if it turned out that I returned it due to it being a stolen bicycle.

Still, nevertheless, I do not believe that feigning ignorance and continuing to ride it like this was the right choice to take. Furthermore, I have an idea to locate where the owner stays.

"Hey, Yui. This girl doesn't respond to voice commands, does she?"

When I asked with the bottle still in my hand, Yui gave a curt nod.

'That's correct, Papa. It seems she only reacts to input from a touchscreen monitor. But I can convert your voice commands and pass it on to her, Papa.'

"I see. Then… first of all, what's her name?"

Hearing my question, Yui turned her eyes to her side and the girl quickly lifted her face and answered.

'I am «Cel».'

"Cel… huh."

Naturally, that name was probably taken from *celeste*. Nodding, I continued with my queries.
"Cel, do you have means of contacting your master?"

'Corresponding data cannot be found in storage.'

Well, that was only normal. People usually wouldn't register their phone numbers or mail addresses in a bicycle data logger. Having expected the answer, I voiced out my next instruction.

"Then, display the previous traveling route, please."

'Yes, Master.'

After around two seconds of lag, a map of southern Saitama was displayed in my vision. Upon zooming in to the outskirts of Arakawa, a light blue line faded into existence. The previous owner normally went through this Cycling Road too. While feeling relieved it wasn't some distant location, I focused on the route displayed.

A one-way trip was approximately 30 kilometers and the departure point was—Fujimi, Saitama. Naturally enough, that would be the previous owner's home. The park I set as my destination was a sheer 2 kilometers or so away, so that meant I could return this Bianchi today as well. As long as the owner didn't move away, that is.

Aside from that, my resolution.

"…Cel. I'm not your master. Do you want to return to your real master?"

Having heard the question, Yui gently shook her head with her eyelashes lowered.

'I'm sorry, Papa. I am unable to convert that question.'

"Aah… I see, that's only to be expected. Sorry about that."

Of course, Cel didn't show any sort of response, but my heart had already decided. There wasn't any chance she didn't want to return, was there?

"Yui, reset the destination to the departure point in the data received from Cel."

'…Yes, Papa. The re-routing is completed.'

"Alright… let's go, then!"

Locking my right foot back onto the clipless pedal, I began cycling the Bianchi against the south wind once more.

Cel's specifications should have been incomparably lower than Yui, but she concealed an unexpected ability within.
Having obtained GPS data via Yui, Cel began conveying the Cycling Road's essential points in detail. Blind spots caused by either barriers preventing entry of four-wheeled vehicles or obstacles, and on top of that, even gaps of various sizes, were accurately pointed out by her, so my ride felt much more reassuring.

Of course, that did not cover obstacles that weren't there two and a half years ago, but she seemed to be aggregating that data automatically.

Standing atop the portable terminal and giving my instructions such as 'The road surface is in bad condition, fifty meters in front' or 'There is a difference of twenty centimeters in level, please slow down', Cel seemed just like a fairy dwelling within the bicycle. Thanks to her, I reached the initial destination, the spark, ninety minutes after leaving my home without meeting any trouble along the way. I had planned to turn back here but continued onwards instead, after replenishing my drink bottle. Crossing the bridge south of the park and entering Fujimi, I cycled for around five minutes through the residential district before the navigation arrow disappeared in the blink of an eye.

'Papa, we have arrived at the destination.'

I listened to Yui speak while scanning through my surroundings.

To the right of the road was a children's playpark. To the left was the gate to a detached house. Thus, this house could certainly be considered to be the previous owner's residence. After that went through my head, I finally realized how I would have given up if it was an apartment or a condominium at the destination, but I suppose everything turned out for the best in the end.

Gotten down from the Bianchi, I peeked into the building through the black fence. A white minivan laid under the carport on the lawn and three bicycles, mamachari, were parked by the entryway. Getting reported by those living in the neighborhood seemed probable if I peeked any longer, so I steeled my resolve and extended my hand towards the intercom.

A dragged-out 'yes' immediately came back, so I named myself and briefly gave the purpose of my visit. Namely, that I brought back a bicycle that might have been stolen from this house.

The one who came out from the entranceway was a woman who appeared to be her mid-twenties. She crossed the front yard in a half run, her sandals going pitter-patter, and opened the gate, taken aback the moment she saw me—no, the bicycle. Although I was around eighty percent prepared for the Bianchi to have been a stolen bicycle by this point in time, I still explained the circumstances in detail. How the bicycle was bought secondhand from a bicycle shop in Kawagoe. How I found it strange that a data logger was left behind and how I got here through the travel route records. And lastly, how I would return it if the owner desired so—

"I see… so that's how it was. I'm sorry for making you go so far out of your way for this."

The woman who lowered her head, her tied-up hair swaying behind, assumed a somewhat complicated expression and continued.

"This bicycle belongs to my little brother, a university student… or it used to. But it wasn't stolen or anything."

“Eeh… was it a trade-in? If that was the case, why would the data still…”

When I asked back, surprised that it wasn’t stolen, the woman made an expression that seemed at a loss on how to answer. Putting her two hands away into the front pocket of her deep-blue parka, she looked up at the second story of the house. One of the windows across the veranda had its curtains shut tight, without any gaps, despite it being daytime.

Returning her eyes towards me after a short while, the woman slowly began to talk.

“…My little brother was denied from riding bicycles due to certain circumstances in the autumn three years ago. It wasn’t exactly an injury, disease, or anything of that sort… it’s just that until last autumn, for a length of over two years, how do I say this… he got bedridden…”

Right when I heard her get to that part, I drew a sharp breath and opened my two eyes wide.

Started three years ago, that would make it the autumn of 2022; ended last year, that would be the autumn of 2024; bedridden due to a reason besides injury or disease. If that was the case, to put it specifically, those «circumstances» the woman spoke of would be…

Facing the mute me, the woman continued talking with her eyes lowered.

“His body had thoroughly weakened when he regained consciousness… although he was able to walk again after rehabilitation, he shut himself up in his room ever since returning home. He won’t go to university and of course, he won’t even give bicycles a single glance… he just keeps on playing VR games the entire time. And when he didn’t stop even after the year changed, Father got rid of the bicycle in his anger without caring about the consequences. It was supposed to be a present for him getting into university too…”

Getting to that point in her story, the woman raised her face with a start and awkwardly laughed.

“Dear me, I’m very sorry about making you listen to all of that despite it having nothing to do with you. That’s why that bicycle isn’t a stolen one. I’m sure my brother won’t be riding it anymore, so I believe the bicycle will be more happy if you ride it.”

“……I see, so that’s how it was…”

I murmured and dropped my sight towards the Bianchi.

Having understood the conversation with the woman, Yui showed a worried face on top the handlebars, but Cel’s expression remained constant as she stood atop the portable terminal. Awaiting the next command from «Master» without the slight movement.

“…Was your little brother in the faculty of science?”

The woman blinked once, then smiled and nodded at my query.

“Yes, he attended a rather advanced university for science and technology in Tokyo. Why?”

“There are modifications on this bicycle that are on a level that’s a little impossible for an amateur. It’s thanks to those that I managed to come all the way here, though…”

“I see… Kirigaya-kun… was it? Thank you very much, I mean it. I’ll tell my little brother that you came by. And that this bicycle is still going strong, even now.”

“……Okay.”

I couldn’t do anything but to lower my head as I answered so.

I am around ninety percent certain that the Bianchi’s previous owner, the little brother of this woman in front of me, was an «SAO survivor» like myself. I, too, experienced how much the body weakens over a comatose period of two years with my own. Especially so for a cyclist, it must be difficult to cope with the sense of loss that came with the decline of his painstakingly trained leg muscles. It wasn’t strange for him to never want to ride a bicycle ever again.

However. I want to believe. That at the very least, the woman’s little brother still has feelings for «Cel»… the personified interface he poured his love into, the love he had to build a dynamo into the BB to change his leg strength into electricity and pump it into a battery.

“Erm… could I ask your little brother a question? Wouldn’t he take the data logger at least?”

I said, and the woman tilted her head a little, but answered with an “okay” and took out a portable terminal from her parka pocket. She didn’t start a voice call but sent a mail instead and looked back up at the second story of the house.

Fortunately, perhaps he wasn’t in full dive at the moment as the window curtains moved slightly—or so it seemed. A ringtone played from the woman’s terminal after a while.

“Erm… the *po*… ‘the *post* should be taken out first, then you can remove the *data logger* if you pull on the *ring* inside the *seat tube*‘… hey, Kirigaya-kun, you understood that?”
“I do.”

I nodded with a smile and loosened the seatpost clamp of the Bianchi leaning against the gatepost. Pulling off the entire saddle from the frame and peeking into the tube, I could certainly see a small ring. Seeing as he didn’t notice this, the Rinrindou uncle probably didn’t try taking the post out.

Inserting my fingertip into the ring and gently putting strength into it, I could feel the sensation of something coming out. The end of the carefully pulled out ring had a smallish data terminal attached. Removing the cord that probably came with the dynamo, I handed the terminal over to the woman.

A thought then flashed into my mind and I looked at the handlebars; Cel’s figure was still there. Perhaps because the terminal had been charged to a certain level, but it seems the connection to Yui was still being

maintained. However, ANT+ was a super-short range wireless communication protocol, so the connection should be severed when the woman returns to the house.

"…Thank you. I'll be passing it on to my little brother, then."

The woman who received the data logger lowered her head and spoke as though that particular thought had just occurred to her.

"That's right, Kirigaya-kun, if it's okay with you, could you tell me your contact details? I'll get my little brother to go over to Kawagoe to thank you if he ever gets in the mood to go out and buy a new bicycle."

"Eh, no, you don't have…"

I accepted the woman's terminal despite trying to be courteous and typed in my name and mail address before returning it. She told me her name as well, then gave another deep bow.

"Truly, thanks a lot. Please take good care of that bicycle."

Taking my eyes off the woman who went back into the house, I looked at the Bianchi's handlebars.

The connection severed and the celeste fairy standing atop the portable terminal vanished; immediately before that—

She sweetly grinned, or so it seemed.

The spring wind was fickle and by the time I turned to return to Kawagoe, it changed from south to north. In other words, my trip home would be against the wind as well.
Sometime after I started riding against adversity on the Cycling Road, Yui shouted out while pointing ahead at the road.

'Papa, there's a dent thirty meters ahead!'

"Huh, weren't we cycling on the opposite side earlier?"

Yui smugly puffed out her chest at the surprised me.

'I received data on the road surface from Cel-san! We talked about lots of other stuff too!'

"Talked… about…"

—Cel can't talk like you, can she; holding back those words, I simply said, "I see", and smiled. Human language is nothing more than one communication protocol among many to Yui.

Sitting down on the handlebars and swaying her body right and left as she reported on the road surface's condition, Yui suddenly turned about and spoke.

‘Papa. We’ll get to meet Cel-san again, won’t we?’

“Yeah, we’ll meet her, I’m sure of that.”

Nodding, I shifted up a gear, then stepped down onto the pedal with all I had.

Author Afterword

Kawahara here.

I’ve just ended up writing what’s marked as an SAO short story despite the complete lack of gaming in it and fully exposing my personal hobbies for the first time there.

The plotline I thought up at first was something like «Kirito giving the ladies squadron chocolate as an expression of gratitude», but as for why I didn’t write that, it’s because an express delivery parcel came from the editorial department in mid-February, labeled «Contents: Foodstuff», so I thought, ‘This must be chocolate for me from the readers!’, and opened it up in anticipation before seeing that its contents were samples of «AW x SAO White-Black Manjuu», causing me to crumble onto my knees. Nah, those manjuu actually were tasty though. I received chocolates on a later day too. Thank you very much.

And so, this short story became ‘A tale of Kirito riding a bicycle’, but it’s a story I wanted to write since the past as well, so I would be glad if you enjoyed it. I’ll write a story that involves playing games next time.